

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PGOV, PORS, GR

SUBJECT: "THE SPIDER" - SYMPTOM OF THE RADICAL RIGHT?

1. SUMMARY - FOR THE PAST TWO WEEKS GREEK NEWSPAPER READERS HAVE BEEN TITILLATED WITH TALES OF "ARAXNI" (THE SPIDER), AN ALLEGEDLY RIGHT-WING GROUP OF THESSALONIANS DEVOTED TO PRESERVING ITS BRAND OF DEMOCRACY THROUGH THREATENING PHONE CALLS, SLASHING OF TIRES AND OCCASIONAL MILD BOMBINGS WITH FIRE CRACKERS AND CHERRY BOMBS. THE SPIDER IS IN THE NEWS BECAUSE OF ITS ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN AUTOMOBILE DEATH

MAY 1, OF DEPUTY ALEXANDROS PANAGHOULIS. IT IS A BIZARRE TALE WITH A BIZARRE CAST OF CHARACTERS, AND IT IS BEING OFFICIALLY DISCOUNTED, BUT IT SERVES TO REMIND THAT VIOLENCE PRONE POLITICAL ELEMENTS DO EXIST IN GREECE, AND THAT EITHER INTENTIONALLY OR THROUGH STUPIDITY THEIR ACTS COULD ESCALATE TO SERIOUS INCIDENTS WITH A POTENTIALLY DAMAGING EFFECT ON DOMESTIC POLITICAL STABILITY. END SUMMARY.

2. THE SPIDER AFFAIR BROKE INTO THE PRESS WHEN REPORTS BEGAN APPEARING THAT GEORGE LEONARDOS OF THESSALONIKI HAD APPROACHED THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC ORDER IN ATHENS THROUGH THE ATHENIAN PAPERS, TA NEA AND TO VIMA, WITH A STORY ABOUT SPIDER, A SECRET RIGHT-WING ORGANIZATION IN THESSALONIKI DEDICATED TO FIGHTING "COMMUNISM". ACCORDING TO LEONARDOS, THE PRINCIPALS OF SPIDER WERE DR. VASSILIOS KASELAS, A
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35-YEAR OLD THESSALONIKI PHYSICIAN IMPLICATED IN THE 1963

DEATH OF DEPUTY GEORGE LAMBRAKIS WHO WAS ALLEGEDLY A KYP AGENT DURING THE DICTATORSHIP; ANTONIOS MICHALOPOULES, NOW LIVING IN THESSALONIKI AND SUPPOSEDLY AN EOKA B MEMBER; AND AN UNKNOWN ITALIAN, FIRST NAME ANTONIO. LEONARDOS SAID HE WAS ASKED TO JOIN SPIDER IN EARLY 1976 BUT REFUSED.

3. LEONARDOS IS THE MOST DISREPUTABLE OF THE LOT. HE IS A NOTORIOUS PROFESSIONAL GAMBLER WHO OCCUPIES A PROMINENT POSITION IN THESSALONIKI'S GREY WORLD OF POLICE INFORMANTS AND PETTY CRIMINALS. HE IS NOW BELIEVED TO OPERATE A CAFE/GAMBLING PARLOR IN THESSALONIKI, AN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY WHICH THE POLICE OVERLOOK. HE WAS ALSO IMPLICATED IN LAMBRAKIS' DEATH, AND HE HAS BEEN IMPRISONED FOR GAMBLING AND SLANDER.

4. AMONG THE ACTS LEONARDOS ALLEGED SPIDER WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR WERE THE PLACING OF A SMALL BOMB IN A LEFTIST THESSALONIKI BOOK STORE AND A HAND GRENADE BOMB IN THE HIGHER INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL OF THESSALONIKI. THE PANAGHOULIS CONNECTION ACCORDING TO LEONARDOS CAME FROM A REMARK BY MICHALOPOULOS PRIOR TO PANAGHOULIS' DEATH THAT SPIDER INTENDED TO TEACH HIM A LESSON ("GIVE HIM A RECITAL"). AFTER PANAGHOULIS' DEATH, LEONARDOS ASKED MICHALOPOULOS IF THIS WAS WHAT HE HAD INTENDED AND HE REPLIED TO THE EFFECT THAT NO, THINGS HAD GOTTEN OUT OF HAND.

5. MICHALOPOULOS FIRMLY DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF SPIDER OR ANY CONVERSATION ABOUT PANAGHOULIS WITH LEONARDOS. THE TRAIL TEMPORARILY HEATED UP WHEN VASELAS REPORTEDLY ACKNOWLEDGED HE HAD HEARD OF THE SPIDER -- AS A CHARACTER IN THE 1950 RADIO SERIAL "FU MAN CHU". AFTER EXTENSIVE QUESTIONING BY THE ATHENS' INVESTIGATING AUTHORITIES (AND A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE PRINCIPALS), LEONARDOS' STORY FELL APART AND THE SPIDER CASE IS REPORTEDLY CLOSED.

6. ALTHOUGH SPIDER PROBABLY NEVER EXISTED (LEONARDOS' MOTIVES AS WELL AS THOSE OF TA NEA AND TO VIMA IN BREAKING THE STORY ARE THE SOURCE OF ENDLESS LOCAL SPECULATION), THE ACTS ATTRIBUTED TO SPIDER DID OCCUR. A SMALL BOMB DID GO OFF ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO IN A LEFTIST BOOK STORE CAUSING

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NEGLECTIBLE DAMAGE AND NO INJURIES. A BOMB BASED ON A HAND GRENADE WAS PLACED IN THE ASSEMBLY HALL OF THE HIGHER INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL ON THE DAY OF STUDENT ELECTIONS. IT WAS DISCOVERED AFTER AN ANONYMOUS PHONE CALL ALERTED THE SCHOOL AND CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE BOMB IN THE NAME OF THE "NEO-FASCISTS". IN ADDITION, EXTREME RIGHT-WING SLOGANS CAN BE SEEN ON THE WALLS OF THESSALONIKI AND LAST FALL A PAVILLION IN A PUBLIC PARK WAS BURNED AND THE AREA

SURROUNDING IT DEFACED WITH FASCIST SLOGANS.

7. PROMPTED BY THE COMMOTION CREATED BY LEONARDOS' ALLEGATIONS, THE POLICE HAVE BEGUN AN INVESTIGATION OF LOCAL "PARA-STATE" ORGANIZATIONS. THE REACTION WE HAVE HEARD TO THESE INVESTIGATIONS HAS BEEN CYNICAL AND LITTLE IS EXPECTED OF THEM BECAUSE THE GROUPS INVOLVED ARE SMALL AND MANY BELIEVE THEY HAVE POLICE CONNECTIONS IF NOT ENCOURAGEMENT. THE POLICE CONDONE, AND THE POLICE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IGNORE THEIR MINOR ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES LIKE GAMBLING. NO ONE HAS EVER BEEN CHARGED WITH THE ACTS NOTED IN PARA 6 AND NO NAMES OF THE ORGANIZATIONS OR INDIVIDUALS POSSIBLY INVOLVED HAVE EVER BEEN LEAKED TO THE PRESS.

8. THE TWO BOMBING INCIDENTS, HOWEVER, WERE NOT MINOR HARRASSMENTS AND COULD HAVE RESULTED IN SERIOUS INJURY OR DEATH, ALTHOUGH THIS DID NOT APPEAR TO BE THE INTENTION OF THE BOMBERS. IF IT HAD OCCURRED AND IT WERE TRACED TO SOMEONE OF LEONARDOS' ILK, WITH ASSUMED IF NOT PROVEN POLICE CONNECTIONS, THE REPERCUSSIONS FOR THE CARAMANLIS GOVERNMENT COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUS. THE 1963 LAMBRAKIS CASE IS A WIDELY-DISCUSSED PRECEDENT.
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